

The National Forest Foundation¹ and the Sonoran Institute are working in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and others to offer the Western Collaboration Assistance Network (WestCAN), a program that provides short-term expertise to help collaborative efforts get started or to work through challenging issues. Resources include:

- Technical assistance (help in developing agreements or contracts, nonprofit organizational development, for example);
- Links to peer coaches (to provide suggestions and expertise on a short-term basis) and mentors (longer-term and more in-depth help in working through a collaborative process);
- A Web-based, WestCAN Resource Library (projected launch date is January 2007), providing ready access to field tested technical resources, best practices, and lessons learned about working collaboratively on natural resource issues.

Examples of What WestCAN Can Do for You:

- A National Forest has been informally working with a collaborative community group for several years to design and prioritize trails projects. The group has supplied volunteers to help with on-the-ground trail work. Now, the group and the U.S. Forest Service are ready to formalize and expand their relationship and are putting together a Participatory Agreement. WestCAN provides sample documents of other successful agreements, and connects the group leader with a person in another region who's experienced in putting together agreements such as this.
- A collaborative group is about to fall apart because members are questioning what the group is accomplishing. WestCAN provides technical resources on how to design a monitoring and evaluation plan so they can demonstrate results, and if necessary, adapt their plan to make it more effective.
- A Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representative is participating in a collaborative effort to design and implement a plan to protect a watershed that supports a native trout population. He is frustrated with the pace of the meetings and wants to talk with someone who's been through a similar process about what is reasonable to expect and how to be most constructively engaged. WestCAN connects him to a "coach," another BLM employee from a different field office who listens, shares her own experiences, and offers suggestions in a series of three or four phone calls and/or meetings.
- A group of conservation, timber and agency people meet informally to try to figure out how to reach agreement regarding management of the Wildland Urban Interface on a specific section of a National Forest. Their goal is to reduce appeals and litigation of

¹ The National Forest Foundation (NFF), chartered by Congress, engages America in community-based and national programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of the 192-million-acre National Forest System, and administers private gifts of funds and land for the benefit of the National Forests. The NFF is committed to facilitating local involvement and encouraging grassroots participation in forest stewardship. The Sonoran Institute (SI) is dedicated to promoting community decisions that respect both the land and the people of the West. SI's Resources for Community Collaboration program supports community-based collaborations working to resolve conflicts over use of natural resources in the rural West.

projects. The group knows what they want to do, but not how. One of the group members contacts the WestCAN Coordinator, who provides easy-to-digest information about how other efforts have been structured, the steps they followed, what worked and lessons they learned.

WestCAN services are available to the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Interior agencies (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), and nonprofit organizations working collaboratively with one or more of these agencies in Western states. WestCAN is focused on assisting collaboration efforts that:

- Directly benefit federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service;
- Involve a wide range of community stakeholders and the relevant federal agency.

What is Collaboration?

U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth has described collaboration as “...coming together with those you disagree with, suspending distrust, accepting that others have legitimate interests and roles... finding common ground and coming to some agreement based on the goals you share” (April 12, 2005). Collaboration: A Guide for Environmental Advocates (University of VA, The Wilderness Society, and Audubon, June 2001), describes collaborative processes this way: “individuals representing an array of often-conflicting interests and views come together to meet the goals of all group members.” Collaboration is different from a partnership in that collaboration involves a diverse array of stakeholders; a partnership is likely to engage a few parties that are interested in working together on a specific project.

Where to Go for Information

- Contact Karen DiBari, WestCAN Coordinator, at (406) 542-2805 X13 or 1-866-773-4NFF (4633) ext. 13, or email kdibari@natlforests.org. Karen can refer you to resources or link you with a coach, mentor or specialized technical assistance provider.
- By January 2007, WestCAN information will be posted on the Web, and you’ll be able to go to www.natlforests.org or www.sonoran.org to link with the WestCAN site. In the meantime, www.partnershipresourcecenter.org site provides partnering and collaborative organizations and agency staff with the information and access they need for enhanced working relationships. Click on “resources for partnerships” to find links to information on specific topics, including funding, monitoring and evaluation, success stories, and tools and guides.